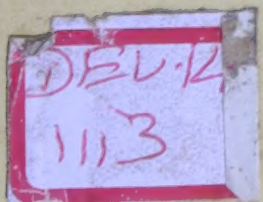


WORKING WITH RURAL POVERTY GROUPS



STUDY OF A
NON GOVERNMENTAL INITIATIVE.
P. VENKAT RAO



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COMMUNITY HEALTH CELL

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P. VENKAT RAO**

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47/1. (First Floor) St. Marks Road,
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PREFACE

Poverty alleviation has been one of the expressed principal concerns of the State in various Five Year Plans. The Seventh Five Year Plan allocates a four fold increase of funds for redeeming the poverty groups in the rural context.

Poverty groups for alleviating their misery need funds. But more than funds, they need education and skills to use these funds. The Non Governmental interventions in this direction, undoubtedly score an edge over the bureaucratic model of transformation of Poverty Groups. The NGO initiative offers a different strategy to the poor, despite its limited resources of Money and Manpower.

To Change, people need faith in themselves. They need to believe that they are capable of affecting their lives for good. This does not come automatically. It calls for an educational thrust to influence the direction of change.

The Village Education and Development Society, is a Non Governmental Organisation, assisted by a Dutch Humanistic group called Hivos. In the last six to seven years the NGO-Village Education and Development Society has been showing substantial improvements in the life situations of the poor with which it works in Pavagada taluq of Tumkur district in Karnataka State.

I have had ample opportunities to interact with the People's Associations - the Sanghams, the Staff and the Principal initiator of the NGO, Mr.G. Sathya Murthy, during the various phases of work in the last three years and particularly the last nine months, when I have visited them as facilitator, looking at drought relief and other related issues from an Ecological point of view.

It is my earnest belief that this little book of experiences in Rural Development will be a useful reading for several persons and agencies in both formal as well as informal sector of development.

India has a large Number of Villages. So does it have a canvass of several rural development groups, painting a better future for their select client groups.

The Organisation about which I have written is well aware like me that there are a number of fascinating strides that the NGO sector has achieved in the field of Rural Development. But then, for a School of social Work, Lecturer, that I am, involvement can not be all over the Country.

October, 1987.

P.Venkat Rao
Hyderabad.

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Perhaps without long drawnout discussions, sangham meetings, I would have hardly gained any insight into the VEDS experience. To name a few people and to thank them is unjustified.

As such I am presenting this book of experience gratefully to the several villagers of Pavagada, whose terrian I had the pleasure to visit and whose joy and sorrows I had listened and shared.

October,1987.

Dr.P.Venkat Rao.

THE CONTEXT

THE CONTEXT

The poor in society constitute a significant client group of welfare professionals. The frequency with which a concern for poverty is expressed both in professional and popular writings has now reached a point where all kinds and all manners of programmes are justified, in the name of eradicating it. Virtually every government in the third world has committed to do something to abolish it.

Interest into poverty groups both in urban and rural contexts have been engaging social scientists, planners, politicians and welfare workers in a continuous search for ameliorative measures to meet the problems presented to them by the members of these poverty groups.

Interest in these groups has not come about as an accidental phenomenon. People in need, distress and deprivation have always been central to the issues of welfare planning that the state is committed to, as a consequence of this, concern about socio-economic uplift of those who are weak and poor assumes significance.

Democratic societies like India wherein popular governments are voted to power at regular intervals, politicians and others connected with the establishment are obliged to champion the cause of the electorate, a majority of which is rural in habitat, agricultural by occupation and is also to be noted for substantial numbers of the Hindu outcaste substratum.

India does not have a total programme of social security covering her population. Also she does not have a programme of income maintenance for the lower strata in the population. Yet there are programmes of development which if fully imple-

mented, would provide some measure of economic security to a substantial section of the poor. These programmes do not bear an apparent similarity to the social security provisions of the developed world. But if they are properly implemented, they will have the consequence of providing additional income to the low income families in the rural areas and will in this sense serve as measures of social security.

The main occupation in Rural India is agriculture. There has been a breakthrough and innovation in the Indian agricultural technology. However this has not brought any satisfactory solution to the problem of poverty and wide spread economic disparities in the rural sector. This agricultural technology was confined to areas which had perennial and assured sources of irrigation, while vast waste lands could not be cultured and made cultivable.

The Fourth five year plan admitted that this technology added further dimension to disparity between those who have the resources to make use of it and those who have not. A polarisation emerged between the more privileged and the less privileged in the rural sector. The privilege in this instance relating to the tools of development, the Plan contended. (Planning Commission, 1970: 149).

This new agricultural technology did produce striking results but often these results were achieved by larger land holders who would have continued to be prosperous, relatively, at any point of time with or without the technological inputs than those who are marginal and small land holders and those of them who do not possess the essential requirements of a viable cultivator.

This leads us to a further question as to what constitutes a viable cultivator's profile? Three essen-

tial requirements of a viable cultivator are: (1) Know-how of the latest technological developments; (2) The availability of inputs such as water, seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and machinery; (3) Credit to obtain the required inputs.

While farmers with medium and large holdings have resources to invest in modern inputs and have the capacity to take the risks of production, the farmers who have small and scattered holdings with meagre or no resources at their command are in a disadvantaged position in this development situation and many among these sections of people belong to the outcaste substratum of the Hindu society.

As a target group amongst the poor strata of India the Scheduled Caste groups constitute a little over one-fifth of the Indian population according to the figures of the Census, 1981. In spite of the constitutional guarantees, legislation and development programmes, they are still the poorest among our poor.

In order to assume a minimum standard of living, the foremost requirements of the poverty groups are full employment, housing, clean drinking water, education, health facility, protection from economic exploitation and freedom from social disabilities:

The problems within the poverty groups of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes show that untouchability is a custom by means of which the upper castes kept the scheduled castes at a distance and yet gave them a place which is subordinate within the system. This system was successfully attacked by the reformers and social thinkers and stands abolished by law. However it is in vogue in its overt and covert forms even today. Much more so in the rural areas.

Once forbidden to use temples, schools, hotels, theatres and even public tax supported roads, the scheduled castes of today, Olcott believes, are groups that mainly descended from ancient people that inhabited India before the invasions of the Mediterranean and Aryan speaking people. Olcott writes that 'the touch of the untouchable was considered 'polluting' (Olcott, 1944:648).' A twelve year old upper caste boy was considered equal in intellect to an eighty year old untouchable. Sugata Das Gupta (1975) Eloquently says:

A strange theory of pollution, of purity and impurity, of certain people living in segregation from others, of people being denied access to knowledge, and human conditions of life and a number of other fine principles of segregation, isolation, dominance, exploitation and control held the five (sic) pillared Hindu social structure together in a strange relationship of ritual and hate; more of hate than of ritual.

The rural scheduled castes continue to do unclean jobs such as attending to scavenging, leather tanning, chappal making, cattle sheds and manual agricultural chores. The Indian caste system is perhaps the rarest and crudely sophisticated. It is a definitive device for maintaining a vertical, oppressive, elitistic force that allows the so called upper caste hindus to rule others. Reduced to serfdom to a position of poverty, a majority of the scheduled castes today are agricultural labour. They produce food and raw materials for the nation. They pay through their lives and the rich ride.

Ambedkar, whose intellect at no point of time in the History of India was less compared to those famous freedom fighters, has perhaps been the only crusader for this community who obviously was recognised by the stalwart freedom fighters of the day, such as the Mahatma Gandhi, who

said: 'Only few people realise that a society can practice tyranny and oppression against individuals in far greater degree than a government can' and that the means and scope that are open to the society for oppression are more extensive than those that are open to the government; also they are more effective. Political tyranny is nothing compared to social tyranny. Gandhi named the 'untouchables' as 'Harijans' - the children of God.

The educated amongst them particularly the militant ones did not take this new nomenclature kindly. They wondered why they have been singled out to be the children of God. Their anxieties were justified. When the untouchables were specially mentioned, did it not merely seem that attempts were being made to make their conditions tolerable rather than destroy the system which bred inequality?

Gandhi in 1921 wrote in Young India:

I consider the removal of untouchability as a most powerful factor in the process of attainment of Swaraj.

Uplift of Harijans thus entered as an important item in the programme of constructive work drawn up in the subsequent year. In the same period Gandhi wrote in Navjivan as follows:

To destroy the caste system and adopt the western european social system means that hindus must give up the principle of hereditary occupation which is the soul of the caste system. Hereditary principle is an eternal principle. To change it is to create disorder. I have no use for a Brahmin if I cannot call him a brahmin for my life. It will be a chaos if every day a brahmin is to be changed into a Sudra and a Sudra into a brahmin.

Even regarding the specific aspects of disabilities suffered by the harijan communities, social refor-

mers were not very clear in those critical pages of Indian history. Inter dining and inter caste marriages were thought to be the best ways and means to remove untouchability and to promote brotherhood. Temple entry is one spiritual act that would constitute the message of the freedom to the harijans and assure that they are not out-castes before God atleast! But this was not to happen so easily.

The majority opinion in no way was favouring the total acceptance of the harijans into the main fold of the hindu society nor to accord them with such of those privileges, which for centuries were withheld from them at the behest of scriptures and holy books. Gandhi was representing the popular expression, perhaps at the same time emphasising their public duty to fellow human beings.

Looked at it in another way, Ambedkar's critique of Gandhi was a critique of hindu society as a whole. When the harijans are considered to be the children of God, whose position is to be retrieved within the frame work of the caste system, what supportive programmes and strategies were made available?

Before India attained its independence Gandhian programmes related to the provisions of source of drinking water, assisting them with literacy and inculcation of hygienic habits. Hygiene goes along with availability of water. When water to bathe and drink itself was denied to them how would one expect them to be clean?

It is only in free India that the development of these culturally, politically and socially oppressed communities received an obligatory and statutory priority. Even this, it is possible to construe that part of the reason for such minimum programmes of development for them is due to their

sheer number in the electoral lists: One fifth of the total population of India. If one adds the tribal population which also receives welfare measures it forms a sizeable group to reckon with, for successive governments to come into being.

Poverty and Prejudice are the most important components of social disadvantage in India, the former being economic and the later socio -psychological. Social disadvantage for the client groups include:

Low Income

Low Caste Status

Low Potential Education

Rural residence for the majority

Unfavourable attitudes and discrimination on the basis of income, ethnicity and caste.

These social disadvantages conversely inculcate negative personality traits such as alienation and prejudice. The victims of social disadvantage therefore develop apathy, fatalism and even indifference.

DEFINING DEVELOPMENT

DEFINING DEVELOPMENT

Having drawn the basic profile of the rural poverty groups it can safely be said that roots of such deprivation can only be traced back to oppressive practices of the hindu caste system. Poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote that 'development aims at bringing back to life in all its completeness, making the villagers self-reliant and self-respecting, acquainted with the traditions of their own community and to make efficient use of modern resources for the fullest development of their physical, social, economic and intellectual conditions.

Gandhian concept of development treats it as a wholistic process making man aware of himself as part of development process, raising the standard of his living and life and giving him freedom from exploitations, economic indebtedness and intellectual servitude. Thus it is the process of growth of man, gaining **self confidence and becoming self reliant and self sufficient.**

Development has two sides: the first is the development of the capacity of the people to work continuously for their own welfare; the second is the alteration of institutions so that human needs are set at all levels, specially the lowest, through the process of improving the relationship between the expressions of needs and means to attain them.

Such a development calls for enablers. Helping professionals. Committed people with an articulate programme based on a pro-poor ideology which acts as a driving force towards the accomplishment of the goal of development.

In order to make progress or to do anything a man must awake from his sleep. A community must likewise awaken from the sleep of backward-

ness, of living from day to day without concern for the future. People whose minds are asleep do not even have problems because they have no aspirations and no objectives to strive for, writes Bogaert.

This means disadvantaged poverty groups must become aware that they have problems/needs to resolve and objectives to achieve. They must look for opportunities to make use of; look for resources which are locally available and which, till now nobody may have thought about.

They must begin to realise that there are weaknesses within the individuals and the groups and enemies or handicaps inside or outside the communities which hamper their social achievement. Individuals and groups must discover that injustices are being continuously committed and perpetuated and that there is exploitation. Individuals and groups must also get interested in exact figures about themselves; how many people are there in this village, how many such people are there in neighbouring villages; how many cattle do they possess, what lands, what resources? Where does one find credit? How much to pay by way of interest? so on and so forth.

Otherwise just as when rain falls on sloping land, it travels along the same fissures and ends up in the rivulets to form rivers, so also credit finance, seeds and fertiliser will find their way into the hands of the big farmers. The prearranged structure of the Indian village society and power structures determine that.

But if the problem of development is one of fundamental social injustices and economic inequalities in agrarian structures and relations, the answer will lie in **organisation and education of the poor masses to effect changes in their life and ultimately affect these repressive institutions.**

This is the scenario into which the non governmental initiatives enter. Their efforts besides supplementing the efforts of the official agency stand unique and often exemplary in regional and area contexts.

A CASE FOR THE NGO

The State as well as the voluntary organisations have been involved in development work particularly in rural and tribal contexts, for the last forty years. Many times the non governmental initiatives have impressed the state and often led the way for systematic study of their approach, planning and administration of the programmes.

Quite often the replicability potential of these efforts have not only guided other voluntary agencies throughout the country, but have received appreciation from formal institutions of the state as well. Lord Beveridge considered voluntary organisations as those initiated by a group of individuals without external controls and having paid or unpaid workers.

The external control in this context refers to the state or the donor agency which may decide the quantum of 'say' in the programme planning or in the manner in which the programme is likely to be implemented. The number of studies that exist on the role, functioning and funding of voluntary agencies in India is quite sufficient to call them the constructive institutions of India.

Every voluntary organisation working with the rural poor has its own initiative, innovative intervention into the social class milieu. Each one of them suggests a method, a style, suited to the spatial dimensions in which they operate. Each of them in short have a programme methodology, an implementation machinery, an ideological basis for organising the programme and in totality a brand of integrated rural development which takes into consideration the rural households in a manner which befits a holistic approach of organising the services.

Broadly speaking the non governmental agencies in rural development have consistently aimed at:

- integration of various sectors of rural economy, agriculture, off-farm activities, agro based industry;
- integration of economic development with social development;
- integration of the total area approach as well as target group approach;
- integration of human resources development through programmes of leadership development, training in education;
- integration of credit with technical expertise.

The range of programmes that non governmental agencies organise aim at the central theme of self reliance of the client systems that they serve. By purposive organisations of them into Sanghams and developing differential strengths and strategies to combat common issues and a guided, supervised method of working with the people, the non governmental agencies are continuously striving to empower the target groups.

Central to the process of organising is a concern to make the client system self reliant. The programme method is expected to increase a measure of self sufficiency for effective functioning without resorting to an equally prolonged dependency on aid from donors or philanthropic agencies.

The acid test for voluntary agencies is the relevance of the programme they offer to the community or develop within the community. As long as the community feels that the programme of the NGO is relevant to them, as long as they recognise the services of the organisation, no agency can be externed by the people whom they serve, even in situations where funds cease to come in.

The strength of the voluntary non governmental agency lies in the method of creatively evolving

programmes. To start with, the groups of social workers in the beginning develop programmes based on their own experience and ideas. Some of these programmes do not generate the necessary receptivity in the target groups in the initial or the first phase of activity.

It is only in the second phase that voluntary agencies even retrace their steps, evaluate their efforts, amend their styles of operation by re-drawing plans as articulated by the target group. This is the strength of non governmental action. The flexibility and adaptability of the voluntary agencies in their programme planning and administration.

Without any 'exaggeration one can say emphatically that the concept of micro level planning, a component of the state's Integrated rural development programme is only operationalised by the non governmental initiatives.

A great majority of the poor that the IRDP wishes to serve are adults, heads of the households and illiterate. Many of their children, malnourished to the point where their productive ability is impaired or non existent. These groups lack purchasing power which prevents them from acquiring minimum calories. If one looks at the World Bank estimates, we find 35-55 percent of the population in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan consuming less than 2000 calories per day.

Income by principle accrues only to the investors, only to those who own lands and other productive assets or have skills to earn that income. To expect it on the contrary is a mirage. Resourceless, powerless, unskilled wage earning poverty groups were expected to show or project positional changes on the basis of credit extended by the method of percolation.

Right from Reserve Bank of India down to some vague Grammena Bank and to the beneficiary, concern was expressed throughout the last three decades that the **poor remained where they were and as such they need to be empowered with productive skills, so that they can employ themselves gainfully, i.e. the process of facilitation to cross the great poverty line.**

One could safely assume except where there were enthusiastic and sincerely committed officials and less of political interference, this was possible with the governmental machinery. Rest was the story of non governmental interventions about which very little is known beyond the narrow confines of those remote villages where they work and where the official machinery is too happy if someone else does the much needed work.

Whether it is 'Tilonia Tota' (Parrot) of Bunker Roy made out of pieces of coloured rags or Chandi Prasad's 'Chipko Andolan' all needed someone else to dirty their fingers: Social Workers, self appointed, who will brave to enter the tintured canvass-the scenario of rural development.

This is not to suggest that India did not have any national consensus as to what form of national development or economic development it should take up. (1951-1977) National consensus existed on high growth rate, national self reliance, full employment and reduction of economic inequalities. The saving grace is that we have grain supply sufficiency, we have averted a near Ethiopian famine. Substitution of domestic production for erstwhile imports has come about, yet as Rajkrisna writes: 'India is a case of stunted sub optimal growth', burdened as it is with the world's largest national mass of poverty and largest number of unemployed people.

It is interesting to wade through the various

circulars of the government and its programmes. What appears consistently is the lack of All India coverage of any of the programmes under any plan period. All programmes are initiated as demonstration and pilot experiments. Even before the methodology of programme planning is understood by the official implementors, the programmes stand evaluated elsewhere and the programme is obliged to have a royal exit.

The replicability element, the big butt of imagination of the planners is lost in some sandy desert. Too many years planners have been fired by economic paradigms for understanding social developmental issues. Consistently evaluation studies of the Planning Commission of India as well as by other reputed research institutions have shown that:

1. the programme falls short of its objective;
2. that the programme did not have committed personnel at the grass roots;
3. that there was bungling in identifying the target groups;
4. that the local administration did not cooperate;
5. that the politicians interfered with the bureaucracy; and
6. finally people did not ask for this programme.

This is where non governmental initiatives score big advantages. Their asset is accumulated experience and faith of the people. Every time a new shift is brought into the programme one finds a good amount of introspection. Schemes of the government directly aimed at individual or group development have often been doled out and were distributed from macro planned project baskets with very little involvement of the beneficiaries.

It is only in the seventies, wider acceptance was gained for the concept of peoples participation in their own development. This awareness is once

again a contribution of non governmental agencies to the formal system. This awareness came up in the wake of NGOs participating in a catalytic role, amidst the political and structural constraints that cause underdevelopment.

THE SEVENTH PLAN CONTEXT

THE SEVENTH PLAN CONTEXT

Too much is also being expected from NGO's today. The Seventh Plan emphasises a great deal the role of Non Governmental Organisations. Bogaert delving at length on the fallout of 'Palamau district IRDP experiment' which the Xavier Institute of Social Services was organising, feels that the expectation of the government that it can depend to a large extent on voluntary agencies for implementation of the IRDP appears as a situation of misplaced confidence. What he argues is based on the integrated reality of underdevelopment which exercises a deadening impact on any effort to bring about improvement in the living conditions of the poorest. The infrastructures essential for the smooth implementation are just not there or when present are half completed. Sheer distance and isolation kills any enthusiasm one might have at the initial stage of one's career in such a place.

Viewed particularly from the context of the role of non governmental agencies in government programmes, the past experience has not been rosy either. Initially the romance started with extending co-operation for any effort to develop the poor and moved on from this complimentary role to a more constructive and critical role of letting the government know what they think of several piecemeal efforts and several patch work programmes and that these have very little relevance unless the structural weaknesses within the social and political system themselves are not removed.

This category of Social Workers, Social Scientists and a few right thinking politicians slowly fell off from the eyes of the technocrat and the bureaucrat. In the last decade some voluntary non governmental agencies were believed to be hobnobbing with the left political party cadres in the rural areas.

It is also true that most of the organisation and educational work involves making people realise the nature and quantum of exploitation that they are subjected to by the privileged and the powerful classes. Some NGOs thought it is ideal to bring in the trade union approach while attempting to mitigate problems that confront the poor and the dispossessed.

At the same time no political party worth its name was showing any pragmatic approach or an alternative to the poor. The very techniques of organising poor people around their unmet needs and social realities underwent changes and were subjected to severe introspection.

Land which is low in productivity and the rational response to the physical and social environment in which the Indian poor peasant lives where in, there is hardly any breakdown in the peasant-landlord relation, absence of infrastructures such as regulated market yards, basic social facilities, roads, medicare, pronounced lack of trust by the lending institutions resulting in perpetuation of feudal exploitative links, vagaries of nature and decline in real wages and so on.

India remains a strange country. In spite of all this we do not hear of massive peasant movements or struggles for social change or for redistribution of power. Even an occasional rumbling or agitation for a better wage is backed by the peasant family's starvation, only to fail him and goad him that status quo ante is bad but starvation however momentary is worse.

Assuming that we build a model wherein such changes occur, there is no guarantee that it would sweep beyond the narrow confines of a single village. Let the wage earning labour protest in the local labour market of a village, we would only see the landlord breakaway the territorial

barriers and would resort to import of labour and this way he could well afford to keep the wages low.

How rational can be the response of the Indian poor peasant to such a situation?

His position is like that of a man standing permanently up to his neck in water so that even a ripple might drown him. He is therefore, tied, if not bonded, desperately to the landlord. The 'patron' and 'client' relationship between two such individuals - the landlord and the peasant is slowly being attempted at by the state through its reforms, interventions and banking schemes.

These institutions marked by lack of sensitivity, imagination and a rational perspective set again another series of responses. We will do well by calling such responses as also rational. In most Indian Villages the primordial relationships of patron and client offer subsistence to the peasant, credit for meagre consumption, credit for regular as well as emergency needs within the contours of the village. In such a situation, rarely would the landlord risk hiring outsiders at the cost of these traditionally bonded relationships: They spell superb loyalty, good will within the village and an unstinted patron control of available labour market. For the client Indian peasant - a sustained job, regular credit extended throughout the tied down period of bondage. So what if the wage rate is insensitive to his actual needs? This then is the scenario of rural development with exceptions being in small and tiny proportions. The very technique of organising rural poor undergoes intermittent reflection in the NGO circles. Some in the early eighties considered the work of an NGO in an uncaring; unresponsive society; a thankless job. All the same they have not given up.

Other reasons for a re-evaluation of the organisational strategies of NGO approach was due to the failure of the fragmented left movement in India. Nevertheless, no NGO has ceased to operate in its context and according to its priorities, subject to, external factors such as funds being available in right quantity at the right time and minimum consideration if not recognition which amounts to non-interference of the local power elites and the chota babus of the provincial governments.

If the Indian IRDP is to succeed fully in its objectives there is a great need for involving non governmental agencies. But involvement of the agencies obviously demands an article of faith, that NGOs in rural areas are important., any sort of rural disturbance that may occur in the wake of promotion of awareness about the IRDP need not be viewed with suspicion and misunderstanding of an activity anti-governmental in intentions.

Awareness promotion generates aspiration. It becomes the bounden duty of the State to fulfil these meagre aspirations in time, without undue delay, favouritism and bottlenecks. Voluntary non governmental agencies are'nt too many to match with the IRDP task of the State. Even when they are present, with low budgets and lengthy task sheets they can illafford to recruit trained and technically qualified staff.

Even when they employ qualified personnel they are unable to stop the butterfly movements of the staff turnover, because they cannot pay on par with the system. What ever it is today a peons' job with the Government is more lucrative than working for the poor peasants and the like, about which training institutes in Social Work, Rural Development etc. keep talking about.

'I have never asked you to recruit such qualified fellows for whom you are pleading for wage hikes. Look, we as donors are pretty clear, be one of us, the State or a Foreign agency. If you work well we will participate with small tokens of appreciation. Have'nt you heard of the Squirrel and Lord Rama story? When a bridge was being built the Squirrel dabbed its tail in water and put it in sand later. Later it dabbed its tail on the bridge under construction. That was sufficient amount of social service that it could do. It did it divinely and later wagged its tail. Happy! Lord Rama presented the Squirrel with three Stripes!. We like you fellows basking in deserts and waging war in floods. Just a bit bad job you do, we will wind your ear and screw you up. Do you have anything to say?'

'No Sir', 'No'. This too is the scenario of development, of social change, and of measely paid, self inflicted, self appointed task holders. They may not have degrees and souvenirs from the Universities. Even if they had they will have to junk them as none of these Universities have a programme which explains the science of dealing with such hard realities.

And transformation must come up in such situations. Most training institutes declare that they train people to man developmental work. The field being tough, tougher than working with Industrial workers in urban situations, most of the boys decide to stay in cities and work in organised ventures where the law, the statute and the interpreter will assist them. Rural development is actually starting from scratch. There are risks involved and the urban educated would rarely look forward for such an involvement.

PAVAGADA

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COMMUNITY HEALTH CELL
47/1, First Floor, St. Marks Road,
Bangalore - 560 001.

PAVAGADA

September 1987. Flash Floods. Heavy Rains. Men, Women and Children uprooted. Become homeless. Increased relief expenditures. Prime Minister of India and Chief Ministers of affected states make arial surveys, spot studies and attempt to understand the gravity of the problem. This in some parts of India.

September 1987. Heavy clouds and brief showers. Emaciated people, cattle eternally thirsty for drops of water. Lands dumbstruck and breaking away. This, in most parts of India.

Amazing but true. Monsoons have forsaken most part of India for many Septembers that have gone by. Scientific American opinion can attribute the failure of monsoon and large scale drought to several causes. The bare fact of reality is a slowly desertifying India.

Pavagada has seen and heard of several monsoons elsewhere in the country through the Newspapers and Television. A brief shower that fell on Pavagada made farmers sow peanuts. The relative moisture that loomed the sub soil stratum was sufficient for the saplings to blossom. 'Now they are destined to die young. Nature has never been so unkind. Never', laments an old farmer in Palavalli Village. He is poor. Poor of water.

This is no way one begins a book about a socially relevant service organisation. This is no way of making an appraisal of their struggle along with the Pavagada Villagers. It may sound like that lonely Swallow which tried its best to make a Summer. The fact of the matter is, despite such abject conditions which were present from the first day of the entry of the organisation, it continues to work with the people in drought, and is teaching people, ways and means to brave

drought and to remain alive. Teaching people not to migrate to Hassan district for labour, but to do something by which they can keep themselves alive and show to the neighbouring villages that there are viable options: Only one needs the courage to live in such harsh environment.

The Setting :

Pavagada has a place in History. Chronicles can easily go back - two thousand years. Inscriptions on stones on medium sized hills, caves where Saints are said to have inhabited and then ofcourse in the more recent period about Palagars, the Vijaynagara Empire, the Mysorian Kings and the British, assorted fables, stories about different wars for the good old terra firma. When India wrote its 'tryst with destiny' by liberating itself from the British rule on the eve of 15th of August 1947, there was jubilation in Pavagada. Just like in several hundreds of Moffusils, Villages and Towns.

Pavagada too participated in the freedom struggle. Today some thirty two freedom fighters still receive pension as a measure of gratitude to their self less work and participation to attain the ultimate Indian indigenous government. Many have passed away without seeing pension measures.

The Town of Pavagada has now over eighteen thousand people. Once a year this stationery population gladly takes an influx of an equal number of people who visit the temple carnival and the car festival. On every Saturday and Monday the town of Pavagada looks extremely lively. Crowds of villagers -- visit the temple of Saneshwar to invoke and to receive his blessings. The rituals of shaving of hair from the head is still observed by many devouts similar to the worship at the famous temple of Venkateshwara in Tirupati in Chitoor

district of Andhra Pradesh. (Incarnation of Lord Vishnu of the Hindu tria pantheon)

Close to Pavagada is yet another temple in Nagalamadaka, which is four hundred years old. The merchant communities from Bellary used to visit this temple. Today it also stands as a major social and cultural institution of the past. People in Nagalamadaka as well as adjacent villages now only look forward for the annual Jathara, the Carnival which brings a number of pilgrims along with their families.

An old fort sans any conservation efforts by people and the state, is Nidugul fort. The inscription dated AD 1487 describes the fort as the most impregnable of all the fortresses built on Hills in the region of Karnataka itself. Once upon a time ten thousand families lived in this fort area. Today there are just around hundred families living close by.

The taluq of Pavagada is not merely a carnival town of gaily nor is it only a religious town of worship. It is equally famous for its irrigation tanks. The Paligars, last of the tributary Chieftians seemed to have contributed to the construction of the Biggest tank in the entire taluq. The tank of Palavalli village was one of the Biggest and important sources of irrigation. It did have a reasonable catchment area in the past. Due to extensive deforestation and absence of any organised desilting of the tank, today, it is hardly a source of irrigation and perennially remains dry.

According to one conservative estimate it would easily cost over Rupees forty lakhs to desilt the tank. But as the old Man in Palavalli Village said 'you may go ahead and do that, but where do you get water to fill it'?

Towards the eastern side of Pavagada, river Pennar flows. Inadequate rains in the monsoon period is not a picture of only the last ten years. The average rainfall never went above 501 MM. This year it is no way near to the average. Despite its climate its drought it continues to be the centre town for around three hundred and fifty villages out of which over two hundred belong to the Pavagada taluq itself.

The Entry :

On March 13, 1981, five persons with their belongings turned up at Pavagada Bus stop. Welcoming them was a blazing Sun, song from the loudspeakers fitted to the lamp post on the main road, spectacle of people eating, men, women and children stuck to one corner of the Saree of their Mother insisting that she buys some curios and toys from the wayside vendors, truck after truck continuously honking their horns, the sound of steel tumblers being washed in the tea shop, no hotel to stretch and stay by.

For a moment they wondered at the place. They have not come here to hunt for a fortune but to partake in the struggle for survival of many of the villagers they will have to identify. The whole place was theirs for asking. Yet they could not decide where to drop their bags, utensils and stoves and rest a while.

The Summer first set the fire. The seeds of drought began to show their parched irony. One could easily see that on the face of cud chewing animals, the pale yellow dried up spinach in the vegetable shops which sell weekly once. Drought writ large on the fore heads, of elders in villages of the first four villages that they moved in. Drought intermingled with three stripes of sacred Vibhuti-white chalk powder applied to the forehead of some upper caste people.

Is this a place for rural development intervention? Certainly. It is. Will we succeed? Shall we catch the next bus, bare chested and run for our lives? A question for which no answer was found then.

Having decided to work with the impoverished, the low, the ex-untouchables (by law of the state) and in practice still untouchables in myraids of forms and sizes; the tribes; the sunbaked mud and water refusing wells, ill health and insanitary conditions:

What language would the new group speak? What Idiom would it adorn? and what method would it adopt? In what way will the new groups' approach be new? Men have come. Men have gone. The other politicals, radicals have come too. Some didn't come at all. The Gandhians with their famous charka also visited these places. The terrain is bad. The people devoid of any hope. What would they do? This was the setting. People suspicious of every visitor, every stranger and even neighbour.

The group in question is Village Education and Development Society. (Abbreviated as VEDS) The group stayed back to start its journey into an unknown future, unknown to them. Unknown to their children and unknown to those villagers with whom they decided to stick their lives gut of hope.

Thirty days of consistent long walks and part cycling into the villages. Some villagers responded encouragingly and many others frowned.

Here are several interviews with workers of VEDS reported directly:

'At first when we entered the village suggesting to people the need for adult education, the response was a damp squib. Near to nothing. The

first few meetings took place with few people nodding their heads and some of them leaving the meetings half way through'.

'People tossed the idea and scoffed at us. What can these thin lads do? Suggestions kept on pouring from the villagers. Except Satyamurthy who brought his wife along (Kusuma Kumari), the movement for others was quite tough. Why don't you do something useful to yourself? People used to declare emphatically on our faces'.

Infact first three weeks, I wonder how many times I must have met people in vain. I used to evaluate the process with Satyamurthy and finally came to a conclusion that I must continue to be perseverent and patient'.

'In the first month we visited several villages in Pavagada taluq and got acquainted with the people to ultimately select four central villages. We have selected villages mainly where people responded to us well and then we received encouragement from them'.

'As an entry point we were satisfied that this is a sufficient tactic. The other villages, even much more needy will come by and by'.

'Statistics of the State show that forty three percent of the people of Pavagada constitute Scheduled Castes and Tribes. It was natural for us to target this group for developmental initiatives. All of us started night school classes inside the premises of harijan temples'.

'In the beginning the literacy classes were conducted in the evening from 5.00pm. onwards. As soon as we entered these villages, children started getting attracted towards us. As such we began games for them and took charge of sports activities for youth, after which the school dropouts and

others interested were kept busy with alphabets and some mathematics'.

'The adult literacy classes would start at 8.30pm. and go on till 11.00pm. With the training and exposure the group had before, they adopted pedagogical methods developed by Paulo Freire, using key words from commoners daily usage and vocabulary'.

'Every key word was discussed thoroughly and slowly the reading, writing and arithmetic was introduced. People in the villages were visibly impressed by this method and learned to relate the meaning of each word to their own life situation'.

'As days passed by, the youth and some adults started developing the abilities to write their names and were able to read the standard I books in Kannada language. The literacy classes were our entry point, in a way, into the villages which brought several of the target groups day after day for discussions of a variety of problems that confront them'.

'In the midst of the night classes and after the night classes the medium of songs, play lets and skits, which explain the conditions of agricultural labour and small peasants, the need for a united struggle to ameliorate their situation and the measures that can be taken to improve their conditions as themes, were used.

People learnt the meaning of the songs and slowly the songs from movies were replaced or started fading out from their memories.'

THE FIRST FEW VILLAGES

THE FIRST FEW VILLAGES

Ashok along with his wife selected Udgatta village. People offered a rent free accommodation. The first few weeks went off well for Ashok. He was receiving extremely good and cordial cooperation for the tasks that he went about doing. Ashok's wife and daughter were finding it difficult to have water from this village, they fell ill several times and showed symptoms of some form of allergies. Ashok had to find a new village. He found Dommatamarri.

DOMMATARRI

Dommatamarri has seventy harijan families. One of them offered to share a part of their house with Ashok. One evening in the discussion after the adult education class the problem of finding adequate drinking water for all the seventy families, surfaced. After a good deal of discussion it was decided to prepare a petition to the Block development officer and the Deputy Commissioner and this petition was sent by post. The villagers then decided that they will make a visit to the Block development office in Pavagada. After fifteen days, a bore well was allotted for the harijan wada. (hamlet).

In this village four young men were selected and were sent for training in basics of community organisation. It is with the assistance of these committed youth that four new villages were identified where people started evincing interest in VEDS work.

PEDAPALLI

Narsimha Rao selected Peddapalli, a place of forty harijan families and twenty other families of backward castes. People built a hut for him, with that his educational work began. One day in the course of the discussion one harijan complained about the profits continuously being accrued to a landlord on an acured plot which did not belong to him.

The very next morning Narsimha Rao brought the harijan to Pavagada and we verified the particulars of ownership of this plot of land. The taluq office confirmed that it really belonged to the Harijan. The next day the community took up this issue for discussion. Many instances of exploitation surfaced, some belong to this village, others were heard from villages in the neighbourhood. People organised a few weeks later and forcibly took back the land.

Leaf litter worth rupees one hundred and fifty was sold out the very next day after the occupation. As expected, the landlord threatened the harijan in front of other harijans in the community and said that he would go to court of law. The harijans were'nt frightened a bit as they had actually seen papers of ownership of the land.

This was the first act of protest. First seed of protest in favour of protecting their own rights. For the last one hundred years, no one dared to do such a thing. Alienated and isolated they used to remain contended in their own hamlets and never did they raise a whimper or a word against authority, power and practice of the land lords.

The Harijans had to walk a mile to fetch a pot

of water. The scarcity of water reached an acute stage. Learning principles of petitioning, organising themselves into a group, choosing a few spokesmen and ultimately rehearsing a few spokesmen and ultimately rehearsing what they would talk when they meet the Block development officer, took a few weeks in the community. A deadline was fixed. Who would go to Pavagada and who would speak first was all decided.

The Block development officer was impressed by their neat presentation of the reality. It just took three days for a borewell to ooze water and quench their thirst. When water gushed out, their faces lit up.

The landlords perhaps did not appreciate it. But then they knew that their nonappreciation hardly matters. Peddapalli was the first village which offered four volunteers for community organisation training.

After the training in methods of organising people, these volunteers started visiting the neighbouring villages to enquire and see for themselves the possibility of introducing VEDS programmes in these villages.

KILARLA HALU :

Sekhar, the cadre worker settled in this village. The harijans gave one small room for him to stay. In the beginning the attendance in the night classes was very high. One of the most interesting feature right from the beginning is that women used to attend the adult education classes and were equally interested in literacy.

The response in the nearby villages was also encouraging. The Kilarahalli thanda had offered nine volunteers for community organisation orienta-

tion programme. A volunteer from Kanimedi village offered to run the literacy class himself. Kanimedi has more than one hundred harijan families. Kilarlahalli harijans have been living here for over hundred years, in huts. No house sites and permanent houses have been made by the State. A representation was made to the government officials concerned and after twenty days of the petition, Sekhar along with the villagers turned up at the office of the Block development officer. A priority was allotted to the petition and in the forthcoming Janatha housing plan; the officer promised his departments' assistance.

One day, a dispute arose amongst the community members. Often when such disputes arose the concerned parties used to visit the landlord and whatever the landlord said was expected to be acceptable to both sides. Surprisingly this time they chose to open the issue in the night class and discuss it over.

Sekhar was asked to give his verdict. He appeared to have said that both the parties have wronged each other, partly, as such they need to amicably compromise on the issue concerned, instead of imposing and indulging in wasteful expenditures thereafter.

This was'nt acceptable to them. For centuries they have seen relative merit of the wrong committed by parties and a proper accord of justice to them, meant, that the fellow whose involvement is more, he alone needs to be punished and fining him, appears a very appropriate method, to them. After the commotion and when they were looking at Sekhar, he gave not a verdict but a sermon.

'All of you belong to working and toiling classes. All of you belong to one simple community - almost like an extended family. If your sons and daughters fight amongst themselves do you seek justice elsewhere?'

'Do you impose penalties that can't be given by them? When you know its your home which is burning do you search for water and try putting off the fire or you will let the house go on fire, till it is gutted and search for the culprit who set the fire?

'At the end, if you discover that the culprit is no one else but your own family members negligence, what would you do? Whom will you beat? What money or compensation will you collect?

'If some one has taken a little more water for his field, when probably yours is starving, uprooting peanut plants is no solution. Instead of committing this second mistake, in the first instance, this issue should have been brought up to the night class.

Yesterday, he took your water and you uprooted his crop, today. What would any one gain by such silly retaliation? Forget about it and work out ways and means of chanelising water.'

This sermon was'nt acceptable at all. As confusion grew and the members started disapproving Sekhar's utterances, he willingly withdrew from the scene, and worse still, he threatened them that if they were'nt going to listen to him, he will leave the village.

An hour passed by. Confusion settled, the self appointed spokesmen of the community went and fetched Sekhar, from his room and told him that they do see sense in what he says and asked him not to mention that he would ever leave again. Thus, our entry into resolving small conflicts within the community made us feel, we are wanted, we are desired by the community to stay besides them and to work with them.

PALAVALLI

The Cadre worker Simha decided to stay in this village and he too was accommodated in the harijan hamlet. He started his educational activities in this village and the response was quite poor. Although there are five hundred families which live by working as farm labour and about seventy harijan families, no one approached Simha.

His mornings were spent visiting every family and his evenings waiting for some persons to come by for his night school. Literacy classes too did not attract the villagers.

'Whenever we met in our weekly meetings Simha used to complain a great deal about the apathy and indifference of the villagers towards him and his programme. He suggested that we shift him to some other village. We were not keen to shift our focus from this-Palavalli as five hundred families live by farm labour here.

A large meeting was called and Simha announced that all persons connected with VEDS were coming in along with other cadre workers, volunteers from other villages to explain about the programme and to put the cards straight, before the Palavalli village. Surprisingly people agreed to attend the meeting.

At the meeting they came out very clearly. They had a misnomer about the educational work that the group was proposing to do. They were not sure how educational work with children, youth and adults can be accomplished, nor were they sure in, what way it would assist them in their work.

'After about a week, we observed that their participation and attendance improved. As days passed by we learnt about their application for allotment of Waste Lands from the Government. The government

officials discovered that there are lands belonging to the State in the village but were being cultivated by a landlord, who also owns a ninety aced plot of dry land and forty three acres of wet land'.

'As per the statute, waste lands and government lands can be assigned by the government to the land less upon application. As their application was pending with the government for the last two years, we thought we need to intervene'.

'While the fate of the application can take its own course, we thought that the land less labour must enter this land and start cultivating. A day was fixed for ploughing the land, some implements were procured, some were hired outside the village.

'Four harijans, four boyas(tribes) and two muslims went into the fields while the rest of the community was dazed at this act. It simply watched, the ploughing operations. The local landlord on whom they were dependent all through threatened them that he would call in Police and also asked them to pay at once, the loans that they have taken from him.

'This development was discussed in the night classes. It was not possible for them to pay at once any of the loan amounts. One of them suggested that, settlement is a secondary issue. What if we are not allowed to work from tomorrow on his farms? What if he brings labour from the neighbouring villages? We shall be doomed by the act of our young valiant youth under the leadership of these outsiders'.

'This made a lot of sense to them. They decided to make another visit to the Block development officials and persue the papers'. Discussions and heated arguments took place' between the younger and older members of the group. Ultimately they approved what their young minds did.

The next few days were spent by the community in sowing seeds in about thirty acres. Somehow the landlord kept quiet. He did not object to the brisk activity that was taking place in the farm front.

None of them seemed disloyal to him. They did attend to farming work as usual and got their wages from the landlord. 'Never was the topic of land brought up. The landlord did not bring up the topic for his own reasons'.

'We thought this will move smoothly and were expecting the revenue officials to visit the village to distribute the land and prepare the assignment titles for the land less.'

One day a harijan was called in by the landlord and was paid some money to disturb the night school activity. He was also one of those who took part in sowing Horsegram in the fields. Heavily drunk, he came in, abused the worker and the participants of the night school programme.

He said, the landlord can help us all, in getting the night school programme from the government **itself**. He advanced to the newly acquired petromax light and threatened to break it if the worker (Simha) doesn't leave the community at once and this night school drama is not put to an end.

People overpowered him, took him aside and asked him to mind his language and also his legs, otherwise they would break them'.

The next dawn was peaceful. Simha was very cheerful. The community leaders came and apologised and told him that the chap who opposed the night school was paid Rupees 4! by the landlord to disturb the night classes.

'After the incident Simha visited Pavagada and

told us, in a staff meeting what happened the previous night. We took the first opportunity to meet the Block Development Officer and told him about the happenings in the village and suggested to him that we are willing to assist him in case he proposes an adult education centre in the villages including the one in question.

He said 'the incident you have just narrated to me is quite a natural scene in our villages. Go ahead. Continue your good work. At the moment we have no plans of any adult learning centre, but surely I will call you when we envisage such plans. That was too pleasing a response. Soon three volunteers were selected from the village for training them into the type of priorities that our group was interested in, in relation to the rural development interventions.

In the mean time one noticed that attendance improved in the childrens literacy programme. The Night school for adults was becoming an interesting place for people to come in rally their points every day.

VENKATAPURAM:

Mallesh, had a different kind of experience in rural development work before he joined us. He was asked to live in Venkata pura.

Mallesh's experience of the past consists of giving tutorials and teaching in a remote village in Andhra Pradesh. Most parents of pupils never paid him any wages for his teaching. Instead his needs, were looked after. Some sent Vegetables, others Milk, some others Cereals and Rice.

When ever required he could ask the parents of some well to do children, some money to buy his other needs, beyond food. Even the poor

who could not afford to send their children to regular school, miles away, used to benefit from his evening classes.

A fascinating experience with which he pulled on for six long years along with his wife. No complaints from any one. None from himself.

Once when it struck him that he must do something new, something more adventurous, something more challenging he opted to join us at VEDS.

Venkatapura was selected to shake off our Harijan identity. In some villages equally poor and equally deprived tribes were looking forward for some assistance similar to the way our group was operating in Harijan Villages.

Venkatapura has around six hundred Kuruba families who eke out their living by weaving Woolen Blankets. Most of these Wool weavers were members of the Wool Weavers Cooperative Society from which they used to receive raw wool with which they used to weave blankets and store them in the Society.

The Society in turn would sell these in other towns for handsome prices. While there was a good price for these raw wool blankets, by wages the weaver community used to receive only meagre amounts. This was brought to the notice of the board of director of the Society but none were interested in increasing their wages.

Most youth of this community asked us to initiate a parallel society which does exactly the same functions of giving raw wool, sustenance allowance and a price commensurate with the work.

We discussed this in the meetings as well as in the night classes and we agreed on certain broad guidelines for re-organising the co-operative.

Firstly, starting another Co-operative Society would require a good sum of money, besides infra-structures like a godown, an office room, etc., and more important than all these are good marketing contacts.

What would be ideal is to re-organise the existing co-operative society by calling up a meeting of all the primary members and explaining to them the difficulties faced by them, and if it is possible over a period of time, try and elect a pro-poor board of directors.

KYATHA GANA KERE

Kyathaganakere has some 46 Kurba families and 17 Madiga families. This is a village where blanket weaving is a major occupation. Infact the only occupation with an economic dimension. They use traditional methods. At the adult education gatherings which eventually transformed themselves into formation of a sangha we discussed the possibility of seeking some external assistance to give a fillip to their professional activity.

They soon received the idea and drew out their membership patterns, enrollment procedures. There were 24 members initially. Raw wool, tamrind seeds and a few other ingredients which constitute the basic material in production of the wool blankets were purchased at the rate of Rs.500 per head. I am talking about the year 1984.

Amazing results. They not only returned the money that they took but increased their capacity to produce and earn a half a time more. We revolved these funds again in the year 1985 to 44 members. Some of them are still paying their instalments back.

May be because of the wool cooperative or due

to other programmes of the VEDS, like the health care, etc, the response in this village has been extremely good. The sangha still meets twice a month.

In these parts of Pavagada there is a indigenous method of saving which most people follow in villages. They deposit some amount with a trusted leader of the community. Something like Rs.10 per head per month. Only those in need will take a loan of the pooled in money at a reasonable interest from this person and start returning in some easy instalments.

This way the community earns its own special fund to rescue itself in times of crisis. The same mechanism was extended to the wool cooperative also. On fifteenth of every month they drew lots on their names and who ever was lucky and needed the money drew lumpsum amounts.

The whole idea behind making an extra purse for the sangham is to one day realise the purchase of a turning machine which costs Rs.20000 to bob the wool. If they can't make so much money through this lots draw, the very initiative is worth enough for another Government loan to meet the defecit.

In all these villages, on the health front, the group was able to promote awareness programmes about soakage pits, environmental sanitation, eradication of lice from the heads of children and treatment for scabbies of young as well as old.

Village health workers were chosen for refresher training in concepts of preventive and curative health care. Pre natal and post natal care, care of children, child diseases, etc.

Personal attention, systematic followup, imagination and community participation has triumphed over

money which our people never had, scarce personnel and almost un-approachable distances and massive isolation.

'We have sought the assistance of ICDS and in turn assisted them in campaigns for health. We look forward for making health a total, percieveable and attainable reality. While we were on one of these health campaigns some one noticed us and suggested that we could do well by using some of those vitamin pills. Our ORT works and people have caught on to it. Sometimes we wonder how far we must go? We guess the answer must be found from people.

Ante Natal and Post Natal Clinics:	720
AN Care :	2880
PN Care :	2000
Deliveries :	1080

Immunisation Programme :

0-5 Years group :	2550
Malnourished children followup :	135
Children given Vitamin A & D :	1500
1. Group meetings conducted	2160
2. Soakage pits done	470
3. Flash card lectures	3530
4. Manure pits dug	432
5. New kitchen gardens	300
6. Slide shows	1500
7. Schools visited	150

This data relates to, April 1983 to October 1984 and pertains only to VEDS operational area.

ACUPUNCTURE CLINIC

Acupuncture is a healing art. Perhaps this is one system of medicine and surgery where people turn to, when there is no hope from the rest of the others. It is a wonder that many people still consider it as a folk lore, fantasy, mysticism, witch craft or hocus pocus. Acupuncture is a traditional healing art credited to the Chinese.

Ramakrishna, aged 30 has a problem for the last 10 years which is described as follows:

When you expect him to walk, he runs. He cannot stop. Even if he tries he stops quite a distance away, that too only when he is tired.

He needs some one to assist him to stop running. 6 courses of acupuncture therapy for 60 days now makes him decide his speed, carry his body on his two legs and make him agile, able to stand.

He runs faster than most of us. He can even walk as slow as we can. Perceivable changes, such as this, earns VEDS-the image of a hospital for special cures.

Busses in both direction stop at VEDS and you will hear the conductor merely singing away the destination. "Oh! all you guys whose limbs are weak, get down fast, this is'nt the actual stop enroute, quick."

Ramakrishna is suffering from Parkinsons Syndrome. Parkinsonism 'a common disease with disturbance to voluntary movement of limbs caused by the degeneration of libitory nerve fibres in the basal ganglia of the brain',Kusuma Sathyamurthy explains .

Gopal, suffering with partial paralysis struck some 13 years back, has just arrived with hope. Right away in the campus of VEDS there are various varieties of herbal plants. May their growth flourish to usher in yet another new era of indigenous and relevant medicine.

Kusuma is taking much interest in starting a clinic for chronic diseases, especially for T.B. Cancer and Asthama.

VEDS Health Education Programme has eradicated scabbies in the villages and brought down infant mortality rate and maternal mortality rate considerably and encouraged numerous kitchen gardens to improve the quality in nutrition. Nearly fifteen cases of Polio are cured and about 200 cases of arthritis, seven cases of asthma and fifty cases of partial head-ache are cured. Every day one hundred cases of various ailments are treated at VEDS campus.

ACUPUNCTURE CLINIC : 1984 -87

	Treat	Success
1.Bronchial Asthama	50	20
2.Allergic Bronchitis	30	25
3.Sinusitis	3	1
4.Arthritis	1700	1600
5.Poliomyelites	130	60
6.Frozen shoulder	20	15
7.Migrain or Head-ache	90	60
8.Occipital Migraine/Head-ache	8	6
9.Fits	20	2
10.Parkinsonism	3	2
11.Muscles cramps	2	1
12.Writers cramps	3	2
13.Facial paraysis	3	2
14.Paralysis	9	5

THE PROCESS OF EDUCATION
AND DEVELOPMENT

COMMITTEES WORK - DASARAMMANA HALLI

Pavagada is a drought hit region. They say it receives a rainfall of 70-80 cms a year. Groundnut happens to be the main crop still dependent on this rain.

Village Education & Development Society-interventions in the last so many years on the social, educational and even cultural fronts have convinced the workers, that these interventions would hardly have any meaning, unless man learns to reallocate his priorities.

Instead of fighting a losing battle of throwing seeds and waiting for the uncertain shower, he needs to look back for some wisdom, he has some how forsaken and look ahead to use it, again.

OPTION OF MIGRATION

The theme sounds appropriate for an environmentalist. Too lofty for a developmental planner. Too much of a mirage for the person, about whom we are addressing this issue. The drought stricken villager.

Somewhere, a beginning has to be made. One has to go all over the options, available to one in drought, notwithstanding the fact that seasonal migrations attract their attention, first.

The rich, too have no options without farm labour. They run in search of bank loans, to start some small scale industries using the very desperate farm labour. But then, their square ends meet some how.

REAL EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment of the people becomes a glib phrase.

It just takes the form of pumping in more money into the people so that they can buy food elsewhere or get it imported, unless ofcourse, as it happened in Dasarammanahalli.

56 families with five to six caste groups in their composition did own a 36 acre plot, in Dasarammanahalli.

LAND NEXT TO RIVULET

It is providence that the plot of land is next to a rivulet which in the local language is called nala.

The nala shows itself, well only when the Palavalli tank is really full and the water works department **allows** a stream to pass by this plot of land.

In the year 1986 the tank received water, but not so much that it can be let into nalas. A Senior Citizen of the village said, that some years ago the whole plot used to be a 'Wet land'. Some how from the year 1980 onwards there was not enough rain, so the rivulet remained dry.

The sangha members took a decision to dig a well adjacent to their plot, almost into the dry rivulet bed. The Sugalias, the Gollas, the Upperas, the Harijans, the Vaddaras and the Valmikis, all of them who consider themselves poor, as such, realised the need to work for their own upliftment.

COMMON CAUSE

It did dawn on them, however that what is common between them is their poverty. But that this common cause can initiate a milestone of an action to assist them occurred much later.

The idea got concretised when water gushed through some underground pores of the well.

THEN CAME WATER

They were mesmerized by the fact that they had neither the time nor the energy to pull out the water from the well. While they were digging the well they learnt many big things.

That a porous rivulet bed would disintegrate no sooner water is struck and that it is better to feed the water straight away to the hungry soil and that even though it is no season to grow a crop, they could try ragi - their staple food.

An investment of less than Rs.25000/-, a wage rate prefixed by them, equivalent to the one fixed by the State, an exercise in collective responsibility made them resolve many good things for themselves.

THANKS TO THE STATE

It made the state think twice before objecting to a well, so near to a rivulet. Everybody understands drought in Pavagada. The state and its machinery too.

ASSEMBLY LINE

Very soon an electrical motor would replace the oil engine caried by them, dieselled by them, monitored and cared by them as if it is an animate thing. Member 'A' comes, drops his bit of oil, operates the engine till his fields are fed, closes the machine and leaves for organising the water management. Much later, Member 'B' comes and follows the routine.

NOT GREED BUT NEED

Such emaculate worker relationship and clock like precision would'nt have been possible had a 'State' or a 'Welfare worker' managed the affairs. If the machine went astray or laboured too much there was a meeting on 'how to use it'. It was'nt greed but need. They have harvested one hundred and thrity bags of ragi crop in the first half year.

The fact that an electrical engine is to replace the oil engine is proof enough of the state accepting the fait accompli of drought writ large on the faces of villagers and that it sees no harm in allowing an alternative well, like this on the river bed.

One could also examine the positive response of the state from another point of view. The 56 families with a population of 300 persons starving in drought or running away to Bangalore as migrants is no pleasant sight either.

COMMON AND POOR

They had a common problem for which they sought a common solution. Moreover they are poor and in their intentions they were all sincere and united. The last phrase 'unity' speaks for a million words.

THE LAST ONES

No force on earth can shake a conviction. Even the poor and the dispossessed have a right for carrying a conviction. If that wasn't there they would'nt have thought of some less fortunate families amongst themselves and awarded the rights to them to use this water.

Amongst these, 56 families, 8 families own no

land. They are just farm labour. They hope to acquire a patch of land under one scheme or the other of the state. Or may be, they can lease if entrepreneurship pervades their psyche. But then the sangha has already secured their rights to use this water for which they have toiled. This is written down, minuted.

55 meetings were held for accounting day to day diesel, water, seeds, traction, cartage, seedlings and other vital decisions.

COMMITTEES WORK

The Dasarammanahalli, like other villages proved that committees work, provided committees take collective decisions. There are more than 55 watchers for every decision being taken who assist the process of optimum realisation of the social good that can accrue to all, by sticking to a decision. Naturally the decision has to be a wise one in the eyes of the sangha.

As the clock like precision continued for several hours and days, the Dasaramanahalli collective farmers have just harvested the second crop and the third crop is standing in the field. Where there is water there is life. It is no wonder they could simply set aside a day for festivity connected with the local diety. A festival wherein Hindus and Muslims equally partake in the accompanied rituals.

At a recent meeting Satyamurthy cautioned the community saying that this collective action must continue even if he or his workers do not see them frequently.

'This is not for us to show you that we can work. This is just to show you that if we don't work collectively, we will be doomed. You needn't worry a bit about what happens when you withdraw.

We will continue to be in the collective and reap the water, for, in being in the collective, we reap water and without which our homes would have no food to eat, you need'nt worry at all'. A spokesman of the community exclaimed.

At this meeting issue of replacing the oil engine with the electric engine figured. The State is making elaborate arrangements to give them an electrical point after which VEDS would lend the community an amount to purchase an electrical engine to pump water.

The worker of the community appointed by VEDS volunteered some information regarding the organisation's plans to shift the oil engine to some other village, as there were some more need based villages where this collective sharing of water needs to be ingrained in the communities.

Unanimous, was the roar of protest and feeble and gentle was their argument, that there is a great power cut in the state itself and that electricity department does not release power on a continuous basis and as such the diesel oil engine must be retained in the community too.

'To have two machines is impossible, we have said so, right in the beginning. If you insist on having it, you might buy it as yet another, community asset. There cannot be a programme which will have an oil engine as well as an electrical engine, both, unless the community pays for it'. The worker spelled out his stand. We were watching the dynamics. One of the community elders suggested that they would find ways and means to retain the oil engine to standby when current fails.

A young man voted earlier to be the caretaker of the oil engine and who learnt to operate the machine and carry out repairs, was decided in the meetings, to be retained as caretaker for the propo-

sed electrical engine too. They all reviewed his wages and also the time that he spends-night and day watching the engines and regulating water to the farms of the collective.

In their review they found, that they have not been paying him adequately, not even as meagre a wage of the minimum prescribed by the state. They decided then that they would compensate him in kind, with cereals. Such collective wisdom is seeing 48 members, share 36 acres of fruitful harvest.

Their poverty has not ended. Their migration to Hassan district for wages is stopped. Now they are building up the strong stone wall around the well and a room for the electric motor. So go the travails of drought and relief. So goes life on and on.

FINGERS IN THE MUD – DODDAHALLI COLLECTIVE

Fingers in the mud: We would not expect them to be elsewhere in remote rurals. These fingers have always been in the mud, sowing, watering, harvesting and finally bringing the produce to the markets.

LEASE THEIR OWN LAND

30 families for the last three or four decades have been eking out their living in a 24 aced land in Doddahalli. For lack of financial resources, they used to give this land to someone else from the better off sections of the society on lease and quite ironically work on their very land as labour. It worked for sometime, water resources went low. Fertility of the soil deteriorated. The top soil eroded. Winds blew sand, right into the well.

ALIENATION OF LAND

A stage came when these harijans finally alienated their land except for a stray patch of it and started reporting to the big land owners for work. It is their village and unitedly they spoke of mere abandoning of the land as it is and suggested the only viable means for suuvival: to work for some one else for wages. Men, women and children worked their way out for living.

ENTRY TO VEDS

VEDS came into the picture of a gloomy people, unhappy with their own misery and unable to make a deal out of their possessions: the 24 acres. Growing families, more mouths to feed and a total loss of means, to resolve, this very important conflict, in their families and lives. Overnight one does'nt expect changes. Changes come in exceed-

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COMMUNITY HEALTH CELL
47/1, (First Floor), St. Marks Road,
Bangalore - 560 001.

ingly small quantities but if people start recognising these small changes coming in, their continuity, recurrence and effectivity increase.

A PROCESS IS ON

More than our reading, if people perceive changes, coming in their living, dietary patterns and awareness, we presume that it is the beginning of a slow, yet sustained movement of bettering their standards. Briefly we will speak of the VEDS-inputs. That well which refused to yield any more water was deepened. It costed a little over 20 thousands rupees, which included their sustenance allowance, installation of the pumpset, electrical connections, etc.

Government distributed seeds of improved variety. Fertilisers also derived from government resources, were the other inputs. VEDS-organisational work and more than anything a massive comeback of all families to work on their own land, made the difference.

COLLECTIVE SIGNS

In the beginning a few families proposed to work while others kept up alternate means of working on other big person's farms. Abandoned for such a long spell of time the land wouldn't have work for all of them: A rational decision.

THE MANAGERIAL PROCESS

A sound and a wise thinking in the sangham, nominated few members to work on the farm's reclamation and was joined by others at the time of sowing. With tender love and care, the land was processed. It was gratifying for them to see, that this land of theirs was responding. They grew peanuts, occasionally paddy, vegetables and even maize.

They sold the desirable quantity and kept a portion for personal consumption. Never did they consume so many vegetables all by themselves.

FURTHER SOCIAL INPUTS

If fingers in the mud would only have to remain in mud, there's no point talking about development of these people from an allround point of view. This is precisely the reason why VEDS workers were attached to the collective for educating people on health, a sangham worker to assist in the dynamic deliberations of the sangham issues and a local woman trained by VEDS to look after mother and child care.

OUTPUTS

Doddhalli largely tackles its issues in unison with the interventions of VEDS staff. They have paid back an instalment of the VEDS revolving fund. Today their assets are a fully reclaimed land, a reclaimed well, all the accessories which go with a pump set, marginal changes in their living styles and as we said earlier the process is on.

THE CASE OF HARIJANS

Harijans are largely being served by the programmes of the group. In almost all villages, working for their upliftment posed a number of problems. Firstly at the level of the client group itself.

While the harijans recognised their deprived status and various obstacles that were put forth by the gentry, elites and the upper castes in the village community, they also knew that certain programmes exist with the government which are solely meant to be utilised by them.

When knowledge about a programme was available within the community, there was no one who would voice or venture to follow it up. Rarely did they ask the village elites for any privileges, rarely did they receive any when they have asked for privileges.

It was a life of sorts, Men and Women and even Children working throughout to get a few square meals for their families.

THE LEAF LITTER ISSUE

In Peddapaili one acre of land belonging to a Harijan had twenty three full grown trees. The leaf litter was being used continuously season after season by the land lord. It was not an easy affair to get back rights over the trees and the plot of land.

OBJECTING HARIJAN LITERACY

In Palavlli the landlord objected to the literacy classes and bought a harijan for mere ruppes four and could easily get him to shout and disturb the adult education classes in progress.

TOUCHING UPPER CASTE POT

In Peddapalli one Harijan woman touched a pot belonging to an Upper Caste Woman near the well. Immediately Hell was let loose. The upper caste people came over and pounced on the harijan family.

The head of the Harijan household was beaten blue. This was'nt sufficient. The next day, they called a Panchayat meeting and fined the family Ruppes Five Hundred. This was to be paid within a week, to the local head.

In the evening when they gathered for the night classes they brought up this issue. They were told that 'Untouchability' was an offense and if committed, will be severely dealt with. And that it only calls for a written complaint by the Harijan Victim and that the Tehsildar and the Police are expected to take stern action.

The next day, word was spread around that the Harijans have decided in their night classes to seek redressal under the Prevention of Untouchability Act. The local elites were afraid of imprisonment and substantial fines, they came over and apologized for their behaviour to the family and to others in the entire community in the presence of their kith and kin.

ILLEGAL LAND MORTGAGE

In Nagalamadaka, five Harijan families were assigned land by the Government many years back. For some reason they had borrowed money from the local money lender who is also a big landlord. The landlord in turn has kept the title deeds of these lands with him.

While the exorbitant interest rate alone was being paid by these harijans, they could never earn so much to liberate their lands from the money lender

and as such were working as farm labour to support themselves.

These lands were assigned to them only in this decade. After a good deal of discussions it was decided to proceed legally. What was very clear is that the amount that they have borrowed has been paid back through heavy interest in the last four years.

If the problem is represented to the Assistant Commissioner who has certain guidelines for liberating harijans from indebtedness, he may be able to help. With this as the decision in the night class, the community disbursed.

A few days later the cadre worker, volunteers from the village and some of us approached the Assistant Commissioner's office to acquaint ourselves with the procedures. An application had to be made to the Tehsildar to have a copy of the land deed made.

The Tehsildar mentioned to the Harijans that they have no power to mortgage or sell these lands for a minimum period of fifteen years. No one else can even hold the said titles.

Many weeks later the district officials made a visit to the village with a view of finding out how many of the assignees of land were actually enjoying their rights.

At an appropriate time the landlord returned the original land titles to the harijan families without making much fuss except the usual rebuking about the way in which their night classes are influencing them and that one day they will all return to him for work, for money, etc, then he will see what he would do with them.

ANOTHER MORTGAGE

In Venkatapura thirteen Harijans lost their lands in the same way to the landlord. Back to procedure, appeals to the Assistant Commissioner the lands were re-distributed. New dharakhasts were made on behalf of other land less Harijans.

BONDED FOR LIFE

In Peddapalli village a Harijan took Rupees Two Thousand Four Hundred and could'nt return in time for which he sent his son as bonded labour. After working with the landlord for four months, the son refused to work in the landlord's household.

The Harijan father came up to the night class and represented the whole case to Narsimha Rao, our worker. Narsimha Rao called on the landlord and asked him to show some consideration to the Harijan family, otherwise the matter will have to be settled in the Tehsildars office.

Most amicably the landlord agreed to accept the labour of the Harijan's son for four months as half of the amount that he has lent and gave the Harijan family six months time to repay back the rest of the amount.

ACQUIRING HOUSE SITES

The Janatha House Sites in Kilarlahalli village have been pending since five years. Sekhar was requested to write an application to the District Collector.

As Sekhar was writing the application, the landlord came in and straight away started abusing him of unnecessarily bringing issues like house sites-related privileges etc. to the notice of the Harijans and exhorting them to rebel against age old practices in the village.

Soon Harijans gathered at the site. There was a heated exchange of words between the landlord and the Harijans. A lot of abusive words were hurled at Sekhar, the villagers grew violent and immediately fined the landlord Rupees One Hundred and Fifty.

Grudgingly he paid and scrambled from the scene. In the evening he visited the District Police and complained to him that his life was in danger and that sixteen people were involved in the village against him.

Knowing this, the Harijans went to the District Commissioner's office and explained to him the whole affair. The Police asked all the sixteen accused to come to the station and explain. After listening to their version the Police Officer did not register the case.

These are but a few of the sample cases of discriminatory practices that the Harijans in these villages of Pavagada have undergone. Through an analysis of these incidents, what has become recognisable in the Non Governmental Sector, particularly in rural poverty situations is, that an accessible man, committed and sincere in his approach, acceptable to the community and at ease, among the poor people, as fish in water, alone can get the poor out of the rut.

He is the attitude modifier, catalyzer and aware of his goals. He is to be found only in the Non Governmental or non-official sector of development. Of great significance to the success of such a worker, is local assistance from the same rural community which has a stake in its well being.

What often transpires as part of the process of learning, educating and organising is a tactful and invisible war. A tactful and invisible war against their own superstition, ignorance, poverty

and ill health on the one hand and on perpetrators of such conditions on the other.

It is only in such an organically real climate can one see and feel people's participation.

VENKATAPURA - PARADOX

ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL
BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE
EQUAL THAN OTHERS

'After that it did not seem strange when the next day the pigs who were supervising the work of the farm all carried whips in their trotters. It did not seem strange to learn that the pigs had bought themselves a wireless set, were arranging to install a telephone and had taken out subscriptions to John Bull, Tit Bits and the Daily Mirror. It did not seem strange when Napoleon was seen strolling in the farm house garden with a pipe in his mouth - no, not even when the pigs took Mr Jone's clothes out of the wardrobes and put them on'.

- GEORGE ORWELL'S ANIMAL FARM, 1945.

The Venkatapura wool workers association which was strong, which learned very soon that the wool workers co-operative society, with several non-wool workers at the helm of affairs was exploiting them, demanded elections to the co-operative. Something which didn't take place in the last thirty years. That was a very fine day. The worker of VEDS thought, his seedlings were turning into Plants.

Four representatives who were pro-poor and insightful were fielded for the positions of the directors. The team of elders which hitherto held at its whim the posts and powers of the directors of the society shivered and panicked. The whole thrust of their campaign was directed towards holding the majority with them.

Much money was spent. Much money changed hands. People who would have voted in favour of their own representative, pro-poor and against exploita-

tion themselves were being wooed. Emotions swayed and people were slowly getting drunk.

The four, nominated to run for the post of directors on behalf of the community were canvassing with all their might in the neighbourhood, Pendlijeevi village. The opportunity, was seen as the best bargain by the existing rich elders of the co-operative society, who charged in, right into VEDS-workers', house, asking him to convince the so-called pro-poor candidates to withdraw from the elections.

The worker, refused to be associated with any such affair and asked them either to bravely face the people's candidate or to come over to the evening class and suggest whatever they wish to, directly to the community.

This sort of reply was'nt to their liking. They were mad at him. One abused him. They said they would murder him. The other simply pulled him out of his small hut and dragged him, while continuing to kick him with his right leg. Blood stained and helpless was VEDS-worker, for quite sometime, till the wool worker candidates came back from their pre-determined task of canvassing in Pendlijeevi.

The worker of VEDS and the representatives reached Pavagada and in the meeting, when a suggestion came up to make a complaint of attempt to Murder with the Police, they were'nt agreeable to it. Instead they said they will call for a meeting of the whole community to decide on protection, that needs to be given to the teacher (VEDS-worker).

Nevertheless, word was spread around that the issue is taken very seriously and VEDS-with its contact with district administration would not leave it, but would get all these ten elderly gentlemen booked and produced before the district magistrate. At

the meeting, touts of the existing directors anti-social elements, came in, to rough up the speakers from the wool workers community. The rich and the poor stood opposite each other. The rich abused the poor. The poor for once did not keep quite. They retaliated with equal force.

Somehow, looking at the mood and tenor of events, that essentially increased sympathy of the poor wool workers towards their own representatives, apologies were tendered by the gentry, publicly. The meeting was closed and the worker of VEDS-safely retired to bed.

The next day one would expect some peaceful unpolluted campaigning. Suddenly the pro-poor candidates decided a tactic of their own. They would spend money if not in equal terms with the opposition but something sumptuous in their own way.

The worker of VEDS, warned them, that this would not be the right approach and after all a deprived community like theirs, cannot afford it. 'Where would it bring money to fight elections?' The candidates resorted to collections from the community which was, reluctant to pay, not in principle, but because it could'nt afford any such payments.

The coffers for 'social cause' as the candidates, were pleading, did'nt come through as much as they expected. Finally they made their own adjustments in their living situations and pooled in money. Their reason was simple. They needed this money to get their own community drunk! Unless the community is drunk under supervision it may not give its vote. Such fine logic. Such fine logic was not their own.

It was how the rest of the rich, perhaps for the last thirty years, have kept the community united and single party oriented in all elections and kept them also at bay after the elections.

But then, the last part of logic was not to be bothered, not important, too trivial and was to be dismissed.

VEDS worker was getting disillusioned at the way events were taking shape. These were not the same people to whom awareness about the co-operative society's malfunctioning was given out. These were not the same people who unitedly decided that they need to have an honest leadership to replace the existing one.

The election day approached. The four pro-poor heroes were elected. They were felicitated by fine speeches when the wool workers gathered at the night school. Later it was learnt that they were equally felicitated at the country pub, at the community's expense.

As days passed by, the usual problems of finding funds for raw wool, of finding means to find food and of staying alive surfaced. This, embarrassed their new found enthusiasm of getting their own men, on to the board of directors of the co-operative society.

At the night school it was decided that the most needy would approach the society with a petition. The newly elected board of directors, asked the night school participants, who have formed their own association, whether there was a need for them to have this separate identity, when their own representatives were elected to the board of directors of the co-operative society?

'What is the sense of duplicating our efforts, all we need is money and that can only come when we are with the society and not as another association or sangham attending night schools and all the rest'.

This made sense to some. This shocked the worker of VEDS. This made several members understand the implications very quickly and compelled them to visit the local pub along with these newly crowned board of directors.

'All the same, we will do something for your applications. Remember there are so many families like ours, whom we represent in other villages, just because we are from this village, we can't do justice to every application submitted to us'.

'If you want to have this sangham going, go ahead. But all the same, realise we may not need it at all'. The speech by one of the board of directors ended at the pub.

Over the next few months, VEDS-worker made several appeals to these very board of directors on behalf of the community to which they belonged. Amazing were their replies. 'We haven't got the money'. 'You know that they didn't give us any during our campaigning. We spent what we had' So did others, including the sowkar's families. After all we will have to take care of, ourselves first. Moreover there are the general elections coming. We need to concentrate on them.

VEDS-worker, used to daze and wonder at the transformation. Sometimes these directors moved in the Jeep. Sometimes the local political gaints called them. Most often they used to visit Pavagada. They almost left weaving and got busy with just running around errands and working for their own privileges.

'Its power, Its power'. Lamented an old Kurba. This was a volte face of educational strategies that VEDS was using.

But perhaps it had to happen. The local association was split up. The night school had less and less pupils.

The utopian goal was disintegrated into an oppressive regime, manipulated by some powerful amongst themselves. The heralded new freedom remained perverted by blatant contradictions and an essential process of all this was the great power struggle of the relatively mighty amongst the poor! Amongst the debt ridden wool workers. Such force of capitalism! wondered the socialistically amused VEDS-worker.

THE ONWARD MARCH OF THE STONE CUTTERS

The stone cutters are a hard working lot. Too many occupational hazards are even part of their life system. Hanumayyanapalya, a cluster village of Kilarlahalli is one such village of only stone cutters. For generations they have not changed their profession. Education hardly made any difference. Some men are lettered.

WOMEN IN AN UNCARING SOCIETY

Women folk have all through remained passive, continuing their co-existence with their men. Little did they ask. Little was brought in, despite their toil in an uncaring society. The village situated 5 kilometers from the main road lacks transport facilities.

DECISIONS

Four major decisions that they took in their sangha meetings were to deepen existing water wells, cut jelly stone for selling, construct a community hall and an 'Aralikatta'.

THE COMMON PLATFORM

We will start with the work on aralikatta. The most impressive of the Drought relief Works according to themselves. A beautiful platform where women sit in a corner and chat amongst themselves and where in another corner men and women sit for a discussion on village matters or matters relating to their own upliftment. 40 feet in length and 30 feet broad aralikatta is a feat accomplished totally by women.

THE NEED OF THE COMMUNITY

The Aralikatta reflects the need of the community,

and its construction by women symbolises the spirit with which women came forward to have it done.

POWER OF WOMEN

Women have proved it here that apart from being go getters of wages and actors of the principal maternity functions they have a place in community transaction, meeting and decision making.

JELLY CUTTING

Another programme undertaken by the sangha in this village is jelly cutting (crushed stone, each measuring an inch approximately). The idea is, under this programme they cut the jelly and preserve it and when they sell, the money would be deposited in the bank.

So far they have cut 114 tractor loads of jelly and each load fetches them Rs.120. This money is being deposited in the bank as a common fund, for use in future.

The sangha on its own can also take up any independent programme. This work is generally done by both men and women.

Since all the families are mainly depending on the stone cutting work, they have selected this work both as a Drought Relief work and also to save some money as a common fund.

GIFTED THEMSELVES

Each sangha member also received agricultural implements. The maintenance of the minutes book, procedures amply speak of the skills that they have learnt while managing their own affairs.

AGE OLD MEASUREMENTS

Interesting are the age old forms of measurement. A yard of thread is used to measure a cone of crushed stone. 20 such crushes, 'kuppas' locally known as, make a load which fetches them around Rs.150.

Around 100 such loads were seen in the area. The money realised after sales is ploughed back into the sangha fund.

MORE MONEY INTO SANGHA

Sangha over the next few years would get itself more contracts. Today's labour the sangha members, dream of a share holder portfolio rather than remaining a life time wage earner.

The sense of achievement suggests a promising beginning.

7

**DROUGHT RELIEF WORKS
TOWARDS SELF RELIANCE
OF THE RURAL COMMUNITIES**

DROUGHT RELIEF WORKS

TOWARDS SELF RELIANCE

A concern has often been expressed in the Non-Governmental Organisations to make intensive efforts to make the client groups self reliant. If such an event takes place, one expects that the action group or the NGO moves to new pastures where, their assistance is sought and where, their presence is likely to trigger off yet another localised process of empowerment of the people.

Also central to this issue of making client groups self reliant, is what modes and means are made available for the NGO workers to carry on their programmes of follow up and to undertake new villages of clearly spelt out needs.

One understands the later in the context of a measure of self sufficiency that the NGO must attain for effective functioning, if necessary prolonged functioning without resorting to an equally prolonged dependency on aid from donors abroad and philanthropic agencies and friends within.

It is ideal. It is easily said than done. Very few NGOs have ever made sincere attempts on these lines. Though every one of them makes a noble commitment to this goal, a number of constraints right from the beginning, make them apparantly nervous when the very thought of withdrawal is talked about.

Very few of the NGOs have ever realised, that when they tell their client communities that they have been with them for quite sometime and as the communities have proved, that they can look after themselves, there would not be any need for any further assistance, educational or otherwise, communities do not respond diffidently.

At one phase a characteristic response from the villagers in Pavagada was: 'you tell us. We will do'. The workers of the NGO, started saying in return. 'We are not going to plan things for you'. If you insist on our planning, we will simply leave this place. 'Wait a minute', a representative told them, 'we will think over and let you know, we will plan a programme and discuss it. Please keep visiting us'.

Originally when the NGO stabled itself in Pavagada, in its intention it was very clear that it would leave the area of its operation sometime. Some villages might take three years, some may need more than five years.

What ever be the case, intensive and extensive work directly at the level of the village through self help assistance seed capital, medical and nutritional supplements, cultural action and sports activities, etc., must be stopped at some point of time. The client group must pickup most of these small efforts by organising themselves and ~~by~~ resorting to collective action.

The older the contact with the village in terms of time, the better are the results of a withdrawl. Though in some newly undertaken villages, too, results have been amazing. But these strides in the new villages are attributed to experienced and tactful handling of the situations on hand and sharply concentrating their attention and focus on a perspective for the future, through discussions initiated in the early stages of entry itself.

One would also see the phenomenon of withdrawl widely understood and quickly assimilated in the new villages, due to existing live wire knowledge about the NGO interventions in the other villages. Sometimes one wonders, at the curious ways and means by which communication of relevant informations takes place in the village context.

'Our older partners - villagers were told that its time that we leave them, to do their own little work, based on the knowledge gained in supervised programmes and that it was time for them as an NGO to think of working on much more broad based strategies, such as linking up extensively with the Governmental programmes, linking up various sanghams into a taluq level federation, etc, etc.'

At an earlier Programme Evaluation of the NGO held in the later part of the year 1984, these issues did come up, particularly the issue of people's participation in the NGO programmes. A conceptual frame work was arrived at to assess the strength of the programmes.

Questions that were raised relate to the:

- 1) creativity and productivity of the poor peasantry;
- 2) evidence of literacy and increase if any in its post first year and post third year data bases;
- 3) direct and marginal effects of production co-operatives, collectives;
- 4) influence on women and children as sub group amongst the target groups;
- 5) peoples participation in VEDS initiatives;
- 6) sanghams performance; and lastly an important issue
- 7) staff development and welfare.

The method of assessment

The methodology adopted to arrive at this part of the present record has been:

- 1) study of reports, weekly summaries from villages, volunteer and cadre writings;
- 2) consolidated statements on the work eventually prepared for staff meetings review-reflection session-from the staff meeting files;
- 3) half yearly notes which Sathyamurthy prepares

for Hivos India office and the Hague offices;
(funding agency)

- 4) staff meeting specially conveyed to reflect on specific issues with a notice of short duration;
- 5) discussions with the target groups at appropriate points;
- 6) discussions with the leaders of the group in the light of written proceedings on each cadre, self evaluative cluster perceptions.

Coverage of population

A self explanatory table of figures is given below. The target group indicated as 10000, is still a rough estimate which was arrived at the discussions on the basis of written reports and field diaries. The actual beneficiaries are noted from time to time in the NGO records, by which we can safely assume that the second table is quite reliable. The latest or the earliest census data base of 1981 could also be used to recreate the entry point of VEDS in 1981 into Pavagada area.

Table 1 - Coverage of Population

Type of population	Largely depended on	Total No.	Percentage
Non-target	Govt. and selves	8,600	46.24
Target	VEDS and VEDS Initiated Govt. programmes	10,000	53.76
Total population		18,600	100.00

Table 2 - Coverage of population by activity

Programme group	No. of persons
1. Habitat and land	271
2. Rehabilitation	281
3. Basic Services	51
4. Environment	500
5. Health, FP, MCH, Ed	11455
6. Occupation diversification	890
Total coverage	13447

Table 3 - Abstract of Coverage

Total coverage	13447	(72.30%)
Actual population	18600	(100%) Table 1
Actual uncovered	5153	(27.70%)
Total target population	10000	(53.76% of the area) Table 1
Extra over targets	3447	

SUMMARY

Simple presentation of this collated information looks impressive. We will now give a second look at the collation to come upto grips with VEDS initiatives and its impact. 'Habitat and land' includes Janata Housing and land titles released by Government.

Good monitoring of Government resources. 'Rehabilitation' includes widow pensions, old age pensions and liberation of bonded labour. If the reader needs actual breakup of services, it is as follows:

Programme title	Beneficiaries
1.IRDP	320
2.Janata Houses	239
3.Old age pensions	60
4.Widow pensions	186
5.Pregnant women	109
6.Rehabilitation of bonded labour	35
7.Seeds/Fertilisers	185
8.Scholarships	30
9.Land titles	31
10.Free electricity	51
11.Artisans	8
12.Coconut saplings	500
13.Bank loans	70
14.Adult education	421
15.Agriculture collectives	71
16.Extension	58
17.Wool workers	104
18.Dairy	69
19.Limestone	5
20.Ante natal care	2880
21.Post natal care	2000
22.Deliveries	1080
23.Difficult labour	90
24.Complicated labour	108
25.Immunisation of 0-5 children	2500
26.Malnourished followup	135
27.Vitamin A and D	1500
28.Ante natal clinics	720
29.Family Planning operations	800
30.Group meetings held	2160
31.Soakage pits dug	470
32.Flash card lectures given	3530
33.Manure pits	432
34.New kitchen gardens	3000
35.Slide shows held	1500
36.Schools visited	150

* as on October 1984

'Basic services' include the Government programme free electricity for the rural poor. 'Environment' includes coconut saplings presented by the NGO. 'Health' includes fascinating work of Kusuma and her trained health guides i.e. ante natal and post natal care, deliveries, attending to difficult labour, complicated labour, immunisation for under-fives, malnourished children - followup programme, vitamin A and D distribution.

'Education' grouping here colates information from adult education, scholarships arranged from the Government for children attending primary school and high school.

'Family planning' includes motivation campaigns and 720 ante natal and post natal clinics and the net result 800 family planning operations. The local daies motivate the potential acceptors and receive Rs.10 as a special incentive from the Government for undertaking the motivation work. These daies also make it possible for collection of special incentives for the acceptors from the Government.

'Occupation diversification' includes Government programmes such as IRDP schemes, Seeds, Fertilizers, artisan assistance, Bank loans, VEDS programmes, such as collectives, production cooperatives, dairy programme, limestone programmes, wool workers assistance etc.

All these programmes by their vast coverage has enhanced the credibility of the NGO. Programmes of health in respect of women and children are even offered to the non target populations or the better off sections of the village society. This programme has increased the receptivity of VEDS programmers in all these villages and in effect VEDS as an NGO is gaining currency as a social service agency.

One of the most effective way of maintenance of records at the village level; cadre reports; and

ultimately at the main office has been worked out as far as women and child health and education on health programmes are concerned. The proformas designed are simple and have been found to be extremely handy.

PEOPLES PARTICIPATION

Before making comments on the nature of people's participation in VEDS area, i.e. Pavagada, we will delve on a conceptual frame of reference, to understand what constitutes people participation. The focus in peoples participation is on the under privileged.

Initiation is through planned implementation of development programmes. Peoples participation is expected to assist the process of self reliance. Peoples participation is expected to better conditions of existence. As the resources level; people participation counts on the time, the energy and enthusiasm of people.

If we look for these resources realistically, they are not abundant. Peoples participation then is a formal participation of some who can give time energy and enthusiasm. Peoples participation cannot become total.

Yet the case which pleads for people participation in development work is strong. If we make it mandatory, people participation is a response similar to a donkey's prank of not wanting to carry the heavy sand bag. Original reluctance makes it think of increasing its weight by entering a near by stream of water. Result: The weight increases with the influence of water (wet sand weighs more). It simply refuses to move. The master beats it once. It refuses to move. It creates a situation of choicelessness for the master.

Did we give another thought to people participation? A real people participation may sound hazardous to the limited programme methodology of HSO's, that we actually have. Take for instance Nutrition education programme. Nutrition education programme generates demand for a variety of foods. The land less and the jobless clientele of our HSO's confirmed with the problems of obtaining those foods in sufficient quantity might question the agency why their needs cannot be met, satisfied and may even ask the agency to launch new programmes.

A real people participation orchestrates the people's needs. May be this is the reason why development workers decide on their stay in a region, say for few years or more and complete their chart of tangible achievements and moves on to a new place, if the workers are'n't actually tired of answering several riddles, questions and unreconcilable realities, atleast unreconcilable in the existing systems - social and political, economic and cultural.

Today over 2000 families represented by the heads of their households are members of the sanghams in twenty seven villages, forming the large family for educational and development in Pavagada.

Having worked for over 5 years VEDS decided in the year 1986 a slow process of withdrawal from most older villages and to carry out activities which will culminate in formation of a body of various village level sanghams which will form an apex and will promote programmes at the taluq level. It is the sixth consecutive year that the monsoons have failed. Majority of the agricultural labour, have only the option of migration to nearby towns, unless some meaningful famine relief works are undertaken. It is under this pressure of drought that VEDS decided to undertake independent people centred activities for each village, suggested, planned and implemented by them.

It was decided that sanghams should meet 70-80 times in a one hundred day programme. Discussions must take place, the money spent, etc, must be accounted for and the proceedings of each meeting must be recorded in the minutes book of the sangham. All the members should be able to know the details of the work and money spent. For each and every work, the plan of action must be discussed in detail and should receive majority consent, in order to enable all the members of the sangham to participate in the programme.

Training in effective management of the relief work was provided. The need for reporting and concurrent evaluation of the work was dealt with. Each cluster of villages was to conduct a monthly meeting and present its local initiatives at a get-together organised by the VEDS. The sangham representatives meeting must take place on 4th of every month. All decisions will take place in this meeting. The repayment of the revolving fund is entirely the responsibility of the sangham, itself.

At an internal evaluation of the drought relief works, the following guidelines were used:

- the effectiveness of the drought relief works for strengthening the primary organisation or the sangham;
- the participation of all the members in the meetings conducted in the evening and their role in strengthening the primary organisation;
- the amount spent and the work done in each village.

In Kilaralahalli village due to drought over one hundred people migrated to Hassan district and returned back like prodigal sons having achieved only a chaotic vision of life elsewhere. What mattered to them ultimately is a small measure of drought plan. It saved them.

At Doddahalli collective (24 acered plot) several improvements have come about despite the ground water level going down, credited to improved water saving methods and agronomic practices.

30 families are not groping in the dark but are to undertake an onward march against the travesties of nature. Doddahalli has seen 50 percent more crop this year. The collective here is wishing to register itself as a co-operative agricultural society.

At Palavalli collective the state has come forward with a proposal to aid the twenty four families with a bore well. The Janatha Housing scheme of the state was received by the collective of Palavalli village near their land.

Dasaramanahalli has shown yet another stride. Three wells with collective work have yielded reasonable results. If these are the present drought initiatives of the collective, getting them attached to the 'Pani Panchayat' type of scheme with government support, is not a far fetched dream.

At Killaralahalli, between two rocky mountains one did not discover a water fall which would soon form a stream and a rivulet. Some senior citizens, who knew about a water source hidden between two rocks spent 285 man-days and dug up mud and desilted a rectangular water pond for animals to drink.

The cattle when on its grazing spree in the wilderness, quench its thirst. This water has extended the life of these animals. Just as we were approaching this 'GOKUNTA' (place for cows to drink water) we even saw a small pack of wolves rushing out of the pond after a sip of water. Lack of water for drinking, as well as for irrigation has been a permanent scourge in Pavagada area.

15 sangha members of Kilarlanahalli were given financial assistance to start their independent units from SC/ST corporation.

Some of the plants in the social forestry programme have survived. In Nagalamadake many received I.R.D.P. loans from the Grameena Bank. Thirty four bonded labourers in two village sanghams were rehabilitated with Government Aid.

Kyathaganakere village sangha wool workers are seriously trying to start a wool carding unit in the village. Now they have to spend huge money on travel and other things.

56 families thought of a community asset - a well in a place one would dream but never venture to dig one.

The place: Originally a rivulet in the local language 'Nala', which gets filled in a good monsoon. A 'good monsoon' was last heard of in the generation that has just gone by.

32 women thought of building an 'Aralikatta', a platform around a tree. In the shade of which they have their meetings. 12 men belonging to the stone cutters profession thought of cutting 'baby jelly' in order to augment the sangha funds.

Thirty male members to deepen 3 existing wells, pickup village sanitation and dry land development.

Sixty one members of a sangha voted in for temple repairs. One need'nt be an atheist to raise eyebrows on this issue being reported as a drought assistance programme.

The logic has to go beyond and recognise that it is the villagers who prioritise their affairs even if cattle ponds come up next to temple repairs. The Chinese believed in this: **'Go with the people, win their confidence!'**

Such 23 villages. Such 200 decisions. A hitherto untold story of the fascinating experience of giving to the people a right to make their own decision regarding their fight with drought.

A right which simply affirms that they too are human enough to commit mistakes like the development planner, that with humility they learn and more exhilarating is the play with little money, little power, the benefactors of which they are, the actors of which they are and they shall be.

The following are the Drought Relief Works executed by the sanghams:

1. Dasaramanahalli : New well
2. Kyathaganakere : Deepening of three drinking water well, approach road, sanitation work, dry land development.
3. Nagalamadaka : Cattle pond, old temple repair.
4. Kyathaganakere : Dry land development, sanitation.
Thanda
5. Gyadigunte : New irrigation wells.
6. Palavalli : Deepening of irrigation well and sanitation, new well.
7. Kanikalabanda : Village wood lots, cattle pond, dry land development, deepening of drinking water wells.
8. Iyyavaralahalli : Cattle pond, deepening of drinking water wells, dry land development.
9. Killarlahalli : Pitching work under soil conservation, play ground repair, dry land development.
10. Medipalli : Cattle pond, community hall.
11. Kanimedi : Dry land development, approach road, soil consumption.
12. Hanuma- : Construction of aralikatta,
yanapalya baby jelly cutting.
13. Doddahalli : Cattle pond, village woodlots,

- water tubs, dry land development.
14. K.Rampura : Dry land development, community hall.
15. Venkatapura : Sanitation work, deepening of drinking water wells.
16. N.Palya : Approach road works.
17. Veeralagondi : Approach road works.
18. Veerammanahalli : New well.
19. Pendlijeevi : Sanitation works, community hall and dry land development.
20. Chikkahalli : Dry land development, cattle pond.
21. Byadanore : Dry land development, cattle pond.
22. Thappagana-doddy : Cattle pond, dry land development programme.
23. Bhopuru Thanda : New well.

REVIEW

REVIEW

This is a documentation of practice experience of field level practitioners who work very closely with the poor in India, in a small part of India in Karnataka State, in Pavagada.

This documentation is addressed to the growing needs of social workers and community development trainers and action groups which are preparing their task forces to work with the poor.

In this documentation task of the processes that took place in Pavagada region, the author found sound social planning that ensured opportunities for raising the standard of living of those who have become casualties of the system. The organisation at its best created conditions which nurtured the self actualisation of individuals and saw the attainment of their highest potential.

This work called for work opportunities and modifying or restructuring certain social institutions, to make them more responsive to their needs; to ensure equal access to the means of production and distribution; education; housing; medical and other essential human services.

Every where poverty is attributed to some individual failures or personality limitations. This is largely explained by systematic factors which victimize instead of socialize individuals.

Often social welfare workers dealing with poverty, tend to focus their attention primarily on symptoms rather than causes. This is attributed to their orientation or lack of it, to the dynamics of the situation that breeds the people, lack of an ideology about social responsibility for human problems in general, their own powerlessness in the political surrounding, the determination of plans and policies for the poor, bias to conventional methodologies and techniques and lack of readiness to organise and stimulate people to invent strategies

to over come their difficulties.

The organisation has quite well argued its case, that if the basic element is poverty it has to be attacked first. The other problems become easier to handle over time.

Its belief that the poor are capable of discovering their most serious problems if assisted through a motivational approach starting with the most familiar of felt need and going out from there to help them find its linkages with the other problems.

The poor do not have a 'poor culture'. The culture of poverty is rich in ways, an expert practitioner from the outside may not easily discover because he comes with his own knowledge and so-called expertise and wants to work on what he calls the ignorance of the poor.

The poor can and do relate to the environment in which they live. This was amply observed in ways of organising the drought relief works. They may be illiterate by the urban modern man's standards and technical know how, but they are wise and knowledgeable in ways, the so-called educated may not understand.

This documentation has taken into account both positive and negative fallout of the pro-poor strategies. It was considered opinion amongst the workers of the organisation that it is important for the poor to reflect on their culture and to discover it anew, to decide how and what extent they desire change - to meet their aspirations and goals. During this process some developments have pointed towards modernisation, while some looked back at traditional and indigenous systems.

A cursory look at the Non Governmental agencies approach suggests to us, that it has never influ-

enced the prevailing traditional ethos with doses of modernism. Whenever the later appeared on the horizon, it was due to the people themselves looking forward to envelope it.

Lessons learned

VEDS, when it entered Pavagada, its main thrust was on non formal education, health education, adult literacy and training of youth. Songs, folk dances and skits and sports meetings were largely deployed. The work in the first phase was directed to gain people's confidence and acceptance. During this phase five disputes connected with land were resolved. Unity of the poor for collective mobilization of their strengths was stressed. Almost all the programmes, which the State offered for the weaker sections were utilised. Men and women of the target families learned to write applications, petitions and started counting numbers.

During the day, the workers and volunteers, visited near by villages to acquaint themselves with the people and their problems. It is during this phase of 1981-1982 that local midwives were trained to take up comprehensive primary health care. The health care programme was subsequently launched in the second phase.

Work expanded in the second phase (1983-1985); from five villages to twenty five villages - from a small volunteer force of four to twenty; twenty midwives six male health guides and nine senior level staff at VEDS, including a doctor. The focus of attention during the second phase was on formation of village associations of the poor or the sanghams.

Educational and community organisation work was targeted through these sanghams. Collective farming in three villages, milch cattle distribution programme for one hundred and fifty women in nine

villages, wool workers assistance programme, tannery workers development programme, mat weavers co-operative and limestone workers assistance, were some of the new concentration areas that were attended to during this phase.

The educational work was intensified through paid volunteers in the field of health, non formal education, participation in social forestry, legal education and agricultural extension programme.

All these programmes initiated by the NGO were primarily intended to increase responsible participation of the poor. A variety of schemes of the government, such as, the Janatha Housing, Integrated Rural Development programme, etc, were mobilised.

In the last few months of the second phase, several new decisions were taken up in the meetings of sanghams as well as at VEDS. Crucial decisions such as slowly withdrawing the paid volunteer force from the villages, as most sanghams have been formed and as principles of community organisation have been understood by the target groups, have been taken. The workers of the NGO were upgraded to a level of co-ordinator with several villages and sanghams as a responsibility. A small motor cycle was given to each of the worker for their mobility. The sanghams took charge of paying for the services rendered by the village health guides and took the volunteers into the membership of the sanghams.

Preventive and curative medical supplies were made by the NGO to the sanghams. The village health guides were asked to collect a small fee for these supplies. The money collected, thus, was to be deposited into the sangham's bank account. This perhaps, was one of the ways by which VEDS, decided to slowly launch the process of reliance of sangham's on its own appointed representatives.

The third phase programme of 1986-1987 was much more sharply directed towards the withdrawal of the NGO from most of the villages. Intensive and extensive training in accounting, budgeting, planning and execution of programmes and projects was given out during this phase. Sanghams were encouraged to create their own functional financial base by retaining the profits earned in execution of the drought relief works. As programmes during this last phase were estimated, planned and implemented by the sangham members themselves, the results have been fruitful.

The plan of withdrawal involves covering the entire taluq, excluding one Mandal where another Non governmental organisation is working, with formation of primary organisations. Each Mandal consists of thirteen villages. Each village will be represented by one sangham member. The general body for this mandal level sangham consists of all such nominated or elected members. It will be assisted by a nominated member from the VEDS staff, whose functions are to act as secretary and treasurer for a two year period. If what went on in the name of organising the sanghams for drought relief works is any indication, one can conveniently assume that primary organisations thus conceived will need about two to three years to be in a position to manage their own affairs. Thus, VEDS is poised for a near total withdrawal at least by 1990.

Awareness leads to education. Education leads to organisation and mobilization of resources to meet one's needs. Meeting needs and developing differential strengths to meet contingencies and further needs, leads to power, power over their needs, power over themselves and their surroundings. This power makes one into action, to resolve problems and mitigate needs.

No body can really develop the community, except the people of the community itself. The others can only assist them in doing this work. The most ambitious efforts to promote popular participation remained only thwarted by subtle forms of paternalism.

Where there is real target group's action, there the groups are also responsible for the failures or successes of the programme. Freedom from oppression precedes development and this calls for systematically eliminated exploitation of any form. This transformation cannot be steered without ideals and values. These ideals and values cannot be rooted in the outside world and outside learning. These values and ideals must be determined by the people themselves. The only catalytic role that the attitude modifier will bring in from outside, is a certain methodological, managerial but primarily an educational thrust to influence the direction of change, which will alone create conditions for more life chances, than one, to the poverty groups.



P. Venkat Rao, born 23.09.1952, holds a Masters degree in Social Work from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Bombay and a Ph.D. in social work from the Karnatak University, Dharwad. He is on the faculty of the Post Graduate College of Social Work, ICSW, Osmania University, from the year 1977 till date.

Currently on leave from the college, as a fellow of the Ashoka Foundation, he is working on environmental issues.

Rao has been a facilitator in Rural Development for several years, offering his skills in training, planning and reflection efforts to NGO's and others.

The Concept of Peoples Participation, particularly the poor, in their own development, came up in the seventies. Wider acceptance of this process gained a lot through the work of Non Governmental agencies. Despite political and structural constraints the NGO initiatives continue to play the catalytic role to bring up the desired participation and social change in the society. **Working with Rural Poverty Groups** presents an NGO initiative in the drought hit region of Karnataka and documents the process of education and community organisation work achieved in a span of seven years in the region.

